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BY ROB HAVENS '88

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BY ROB HAVENS '88

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ON THE COVER: Junior DL Fadil Diggs sacks Alabama quarterback Jalen Milroe. Photo by Rob Havens '88

Howdy Ags!

What an amazing year it has been so far. At the top of my list is the birth of my new granddaughter, who is the loudest and proudest member of the Fightin Texas Aggie Class of 2046! Miss Emily Elizabeth arrived 4 weeks early on September 25th, weighing in at 4 lbs 8 oz. My grandpa heart is full of joy.

On the sports side of things, the Aggies are having great success across the board. Our volleyball team defeated the #4 team in the country on their court. Our soccer team is currently tied for the lead in the SEC West, and our football team is 2-0 in conference play for the first time in the Jimbo Fisher era, with big wins over Auburn and Arkansas.

During the week of the Auburn game, the cast of SEC Shorts came to town and had two live performances in Rudder Theatre and Rudder Auditorium. If you are unfamiliar with SEC Shorts, they are a talented group of actors who put together weekly short videos that air every Monday during the football season. The skits involve all of the SEC schools, and they make parodies based on what happened to the teams that weekend.

The crew did 2 hour shows of live skits that all pertained to Texas A&M. They helped a poor Aggie suffering from BAS (Battered Aggie Syndrome). Hannah Kuykendall, who is best known for her skits as "Hope" and "Regina," performed an Aggie Version of the song "My Favorite Things." And Robert Clay brought down the house with a hilarious skit about a yell leader.

My favorite part of the night was when I got picked out of the crowd to compete in a charades game with Hannah. We had a blast, and I'm a huge fan of their productions, so it was really cool to get to meet them. We were reunited on Friday night at yell practice when I got a selfie with Hannah, with a photo bomb by Robert and Josh! It will be a memory I enjoy for years to come.

Below are pictures of my sweet granddaughter and my selfie with the SEC Shorts gang!

Gig'em!

Rob '88



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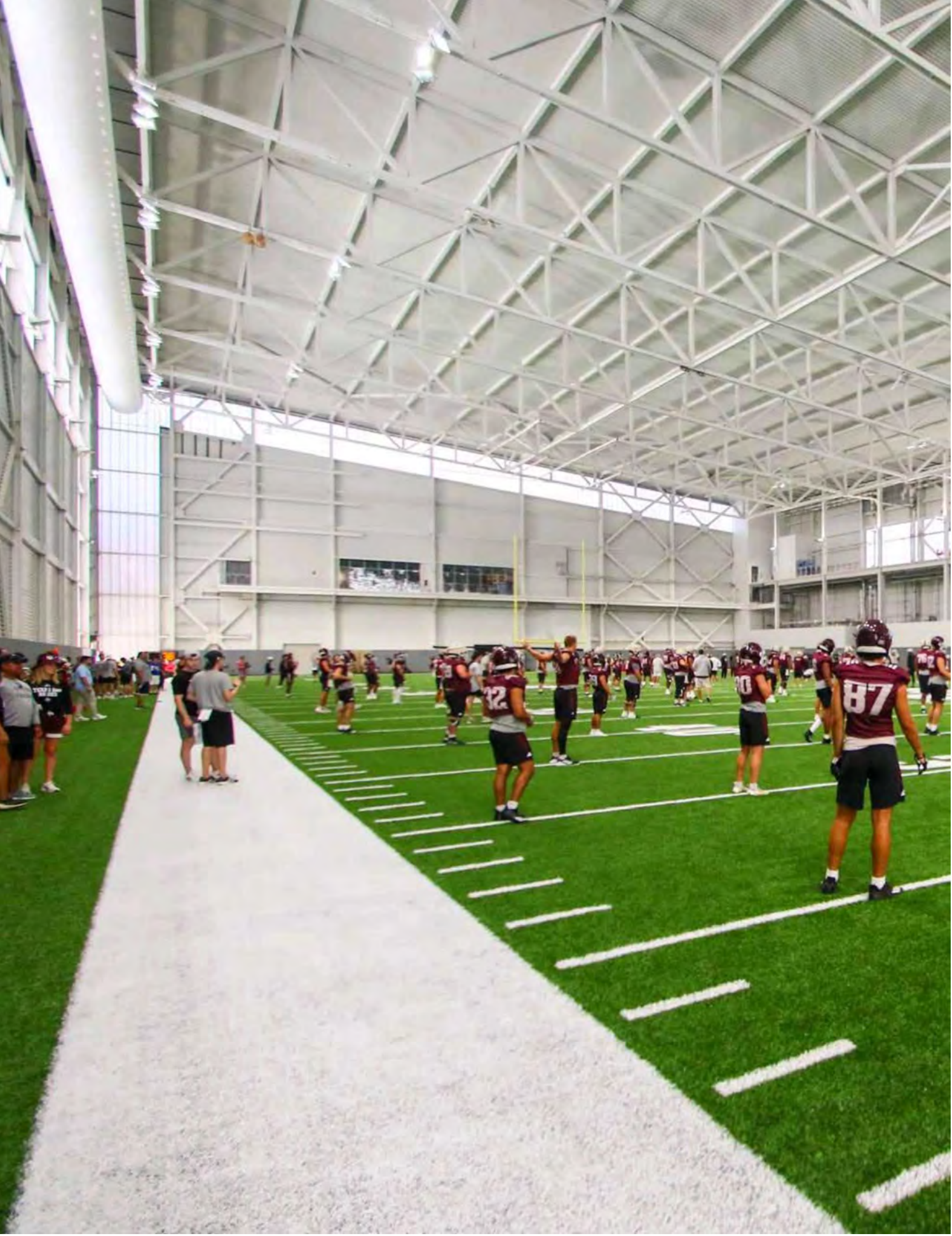
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CANADIAN JEWEL

Junior midfielder Mia Pante prepares a crossing shot with the sun setting behind her on Ellis Field. Coach G searches for talent all over the globe to help the Aggies win championships, and he found Mia 2,000 miles away from Aggieland in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Pante has played for the Canadian National Team and has been one of the Aggie's most consistent players over the last three years. When she stepped on campus, she said, "It just felt like home!" Photo by Rob Havens '88





STATE OF THE ART

The Coolidge Performance Center in the Graham Athletic Complex is arguably the finest indoor facility in all of college football. Our team was awestruck as they entered the facility for the first time. The air-conditioned practice facility features a 160-yard field with all of the bells and whistles you could imagine. The facility helped the Aggies navigate one of the hottest summers in the history of Aggieland. If a recruit is looking for the best school with the best facilities and the best fan base, it is located in College Station, Texas! Photo by Rob Havens '88





TOUCH AROUND THE NET

Sophomore Logan Lednický shows she can power it or finesse the volleyball over the net vs. the Utah State Aggies. Texas A&M won the match in straight sets, and Lednický showed her all-around game by being one of the top three performers on the team in kills, blocks, and digs. Under the direction of new coach Jamie Morrison, the Aggies started the season 9-2 and won their first SEC match on the road vs. Mississippi State.

Photo by Rob Havens '88





BAT & SCORE

The Aggie defense terrorized the Arkansas quarterback, KJ Jefferson, all day in Jerry World! In this game-changing play, sophomore defensive back Bryce Anderson bats the ball up in the air into the waiting arms of senior linebacker Chris Russell Jr., who strolled 16 yards into the end zone for an Aggie touchdown. Texas A&M has beaten the Hogs in 11 of the last 12 games they have played against each other. Photo by Rob Havens '88





MAX
KAUFER



TANNER
JONES



COACH JIM
SCHLOSSNAGLE

SOFTBALL

Texas A&M softball hosted Texas State in their first fall scrimmage. Shaylee Ackerman got the start in the circle for the Aggies, who entered the second season of the Trisha Ford era. The fifth-year grad player allowed just two hits and no runs in three innings. Coach Ford is excited about the new season and is pleased with the depth the squad will have this year. She believes the newcomers she added since last year will give the team more athleticism, and the four new freshmen should contribute a lot in their first seasons.



SHAYLEE
ACKERMAN

FALL BASEBALL

There were a lot of new faces on the field as our baseball team took the field against Houston Christian in an exhibition 14-inning game. The Aggies posted 21 hits, including three dingers, to hammer the Huskies 20-2. Coach Schlossnagle was able to take a look at 10 of his pitchers and most of the roster in the fall scrimmage. Aggie pitchers struck out 17 batters and walked only five in the game.



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SOCCER

Battling through one of the toughest schedules in the country, the Aggies are 6-4-2 after 12 games. With six games remaining on the conference schedule, the Aggies are tied for first place in the West and are coming off a big 4-0 victory over Ole Miss. The Aggies dominated the Rebels in the "Turn it Gold" match that raised thousands of dollars to help in the fight against juvenile cancer. The Aggies were hitting on all cylinders just in time for the stretch run. This battle-tested group of young ladies is hungry for an SEC Title run.

EQUESTRIAN

The Aggies started off the season with a pair of big wins over top-ranked teams. Texas A&M dominated #7 Baylor 16-3 in its season opener, as the team completed a clean sweep in the jumping seat for only the third time in school history. The Ags followed up the win over BU with a 13-6 victory over #6 Georgia.



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VOLLEYBALL

Under the direction of new volleyball coach Jamie Morrison, the Aggies have had an stellar season so far. Including the biggest win in the program in 24 years, when the Aggies defeated the #4 Florida Gators in Gainesville 3-2. Morrison said early on in the season that this team not only had a chance to be good but to be really good. Motivated to show the conference what Aggie volleyball is all about, the team won its first two SEC matches on the road. With plenty of matches to go, they are fired up to make some waves this season.



AVA
UNDERWOOD



LOGAN
LEDNICKY



LAUREN
HOGAN



IFENNA
COS-OKPALLA

Q&A

MIA PANTE



WHEN DID YOU START PLAYING SOCCER?

I think I started playing when I was like four years old. I think my parents just put me in a bunch of different sports to keep me busy because I was a very busy kid, and it probably drove them insane. (laughs) I just played soccer and some other sports growing up, but soccer was the one that stuck with me, and I think I picked up very quickly.

DID YOU GROW UP IN CANADA YOUR WHOLE LIFE?

Yes, so I lived in Canada my whole life in North Vancouver. I played through all of the clubs there, then up to Vancouver Whitecaps, and then that's when I got recruited to play here at A&M.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR RECRUITMENT PROCESS.

So I played for a club called Vancouver Whitecaps Rex, and how it works in Canada is there are three Rex programs across the whole country, Super Rex programs, and that's where you get looked at for national team stuff and also for NCAA stuff. When I was in grade 10, I believe that's when the recruiting process started for me. We had a collegiate guy, and he would bring up top

colleges from the United States, and they would come watch practice, a game, either for a couple of days or a week or whatever, and then the coaches would get in touch that way. And that's when Coach G saw me when he came up and visited in Vancouver, and then I came on my visit. As soon as I came on my visit, it was the last visit I took; I just knew as soon as I stepped on campus, this was kind of a place that felt like home to me. Moving so far away from home that was something that was very important for me and my family. So that's kind of how I ended up here.

WHAT OTHER SCHOOLS WERE YOU THINKING ABOUT GOING TO?

Well, I took two visits University of Texas and Stanford. So those were my two other visits, other than Texas A&M.

WHAT WERE THE BIGGEST CHANGES YOU EXPERIENCED FROM COMING TO TEXAS FROM CANADA?

Well, one, definitely the weather. I'm feeling that right now (laughs). I actually feel like it's hot for everyone, no matter if you've lived in Texas your whole life. This is like ridiculous weather. I don't feel like you could be any more climatized to it. I also just feel like something I've noticed from being back home around the universities its just the amount of resources and how fortunate like we are here at Texas A&M where they prioritize athletics and give us so many resources, like the physical therapy, the athletic trainers, psychologists, nutrition, we have all of those resources available to us. Something that I have friends that play back home, and that's something that's not available to them, like not at the level that we get here.

HOW HAS YOUR EXPERIENCE SO FAR BEEN OF BEING AN AGGIE?

You're asking that question right after the Fish Camp game. So last Saturday was our Fish Camp game; that's probably like my favorite game to play in all season. It's crazy; I think we had close to 7,000 people at our game. Not many other schools get that. Just having like the 12th Man behind us is something that's true, and I don't think you know it until you experience it how impactful it is.

HOW DIFFICULT HAS IT BEEN TO JUGGLE ACADEMICS WHILE COMPETING AT THE COLLEGIATE LEVEL?

I would say it's kind of a balance that you have to get use to, but I mean, it is hard. I noticed in preseason, when you are just focusing on soccer, it's a lot easier. You don't have to prioritize things. I mean, I get to go take a nap, but now I have classes and homework and stuff, so there's not that extra time for that stuff, so I do feel like once you have that extra layer of stress of academics, it does become a bit harder, but I feel like through the years I've done a better job at being able to separate them both and Coach G always says "Make this as your recess." So, as we have school and other life things going on, that might be really hard or stressing us out. We are able to come to practice, kind of put those things to the side, and just give it our all at practice. I mean, we always have fun out there at practice; it's good to get the body moving and the mind off of those things.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR FAVORITE MEMORY SO FAR AT A&M ON THE FIELD?

I would say the Clemson game we played freshman year. It was a crazy game; it was a Fish Camp game as well. It was like my freshman year, so it was the first time I had ever experienced it as well with that many fans in the stands. And my family was in town, and I think it was the first time I scored for A&M. And it was just a great game; we were underdogs going into the game like Clemson was ranked, and we were unranked, I believe. We upset them, I guess, and we won 3-1. It was just like a really fun game, and it was just cool.

DO YOU PREFER TO GET AN ASSIST OR SCORE A GOAL?

I feel like sometimes they want me to be more selfish in the box and take more shots, but I do always

look to assist first but I mean a goal is a goal. Goals are pretty fun to score, but for me, if I get an assist if, that's me doing my job as an outside player, too. I feel like that's part of my goal is to set up my teammates. I would say goal, but I'd take either. (laughs).

WHAT'S BEEN YOUR FAVORITE MEMORY AS AN AGGIE SO FAR?

I think a really cool experience was a traditions thing I had to go to freshman year. You just learned a lot about Texas A&M and, the history and the culture. Also, with that, you got all the other incoming freshmen. We did it for athletics, so it was for all the athletes coming in from all of the other teams. It was just cool to understand everything and see the impact and the history of it all. And we learned why we do the things we do; I think that was like probably the coolest thing. I think it was something unique that A&M does.

TELL ME WHAT IT'S LIKE TO PLAY FOR TEAM CANADA.

Playing for Canada has been some of the best soccer experiences of my life. Like being able to represent Canada, wear the crest, and something I've grown up with wanting to play for my whole life. I've watched the senior national team as long as I can remember. So, to just be able to step on the field and represent them is something. I don't really know, like you're standing out there and your singing the national anthem like you get the chills because it's just so cool to be able to represent Canada. And hopefully, one day, I get a chance to represent at the senior level. Being able to play for the U15, U17, U20 teams, I've played with some amazing players and coaches. Now, they all go to different colleges around the States. Some of them are even playing pro. It's just cool to see and play with the best of Canada.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO ONCE YOU GRADUATE?

I hope to go play pro after college.

Whether that is in the NWSL or overseas somewhere. I just hope to continue to play and then hopefully make it to the Senior National Team.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE AGGIE TRADITION?

I would say probably the Aggie Ring, maybe. I think that's cool. We don't have rings like that in Canada that I know of. And I just know how seriously they take it here. And the sense of pride you get when you have it and also the network that comes with it, I think that's super exciting. I think it's something I find cool.

HAVE YOU GOT YOUR RING YET?

No, I'm close. I think I can order it after this semester.

YOU PLAYED WITH YOUR AGGIE TEAMMATE ANDERSEN WILLIAMS UP IN CANADA. DID SHE HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH YOUR RECRUITMENT HERE?

I mean, it's always nice to go somewhere, like I said, so far away from home and have a sense of family. Like I feel like me and her, like we've known each other for a long time. We've played together and come from the same area, and so it was nice knowing that when I came here, I was going to know someone. I wasn't like some girls in the recruiting process that said I don't want to go anywhere where any Whitecap people have gone, or some that were like it would be nice to go somewhere with a friend. And for me, it didn't really matter so much; I was just focusing on what would be the right fit for me. And I know Andy loved it when she came and visited. She talked so highly of it. I think that helped, but also, I think it just all worked out. It's nice to just have someone, I guess, close to home, and also sometimes our parents come at the same time so. It's nice. ■

Q&A

LAUREN HOGAN



WHEN DID YOU START PLAYING VOLLEYBALL?

I started playing when I was eight years old.

DID YOU PLAY OTHER SPORTS WHEN YOU WERE GROWING UP?

Yeah, I played all the sports. I did mostly soccer, and softball were my main two sports, and then volleyball kind of slipped in there around third or fourth grade, and then by the time I was 12, volleyball was the only sport I played.

YOU WENT TO SYRACUSE FIRST. TELL ME ABOUT THE RECRUITING PROCESS FOR YOU OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL.

So, in high school, I was not highly recruited at all. I didn't get many offers. In club, I was mostly on two's teams. There are levels; there are like first team and a second team. I was on the second team, so I didn't know what my options were going to be going D1. I was a setter in high school, obviously not a setter anymore. I kind of changed my position; if I was going to play in college, I was too short to be a setter. I was like, OK, I'll be a libero. I kind of made that change when I was like 16 or 17, kind of late, so I was definitely late to the game. I tried to send out emails and stuff, and I didn't really get a ton of looks, but Syracuse happened to take a look at me, and it was pretty much my only D1 offer. I had a couple of like looks and stuff, but truly, Syracuse was like it for me. And it was awesome! It was an awesome opportunity for me, so I committed there at the end of my junior year, spring of my junior year. I was super pumped about it. So, I went to Syracuse for two years.

HOW DID A&M GET INTO THE PICTURE?

I played at Syracuse in 2020 and 2021, and then after my sophomore year, I loved it there. I had two great seasons there, two successful seasons. My freshman year was really successful. I was on the All-ACC Freshman team. Led the ACC in digs per set. It was a great year, and then, after my sophomore season, my coaches decided to leave. It kind of opened up a new opportunity for me, and they kind of helped me through it all, and I decided I wanted to look elsewhere. So I decided to enter the portal in February of my sophomore year, and honestly, I was like, I don't know what I'm looking for. I kind of wanted to make sure I went to a school that I would go to if volleyball was out of the question. So I opened up my recruiting process, I think I sent out 200 emails, I sent out emails every day, just kind of locked myself in my room for three days, and a lot of schools reached out to me, but A&M was actually a school that I reached out to at first, and they didn't reach out to me. So it was kind of crazy that it was a place that I sent an email to, got in contact with them, had a Zoom call with the old staff, and from the Zoom call right away, I kind of felt a connection. I came on a visit, and it was great.

WHAT'S THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO COACHING STAFFS? YOU'VE OBVIOUSLY HAD SOME EARLY SUCCESS, BUT WHAT'S THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE?

I think there's just a big difference in coaching styles, not that I think different coaching styles are better or worse than others, but I think Jamie is very technical. He knows the game very well, and he likes to break down each skill, and he's very technical about it all. Which I feel has led to a lot of really good success. He is one of the most experienced coaches that I can say that I've played for. He knows a lot about volleyball, and I think he really knows how to teach it to anyone. So it's been really cool. He likes to show us videos of pro players or men's players doing the game and then trying to have us replicate that. So I think it's really cool to have that vision of what you are aiming for and then us ourselves, being young, like trying to replicate that. Which is super cool. And then the assistants too, that has been a great addition. They are all super supportive, they just work really well together.

JAMIE SAID YOU WERE A HUGE PART OF THE SUCCESS THAT THE TEAM HAD DURING THE SUMMER. WHAT DID YOU DO DURING THAT TIME TO HELP WITH THE TRANSITION?

The summer is a tough period because it's kind of hands-off. So I just kind of made a goal at the beginning of summer that I'm gonna hold my team accountable. And like if we say we are going to do something like we are going to do it. I have a lot of friends who play at other programs, I have friends who have been on teams that have made it to a national championship and final four, and hearing what they do during the summer is what I wanted to hold my team accountable to because I know that is what we are capable of. So I just really made sure that if we had four practices planned, then we are practicing for four days. I also tried to keep it that I'm no coach by any means, but I tried my best to make a practice plan and help get the team involved. What do y'all want to work on? So it was not like I didn't want to be a dictator "This is what we are doing today." I wanted to be like hey, these are my thoughts; this is what I wanted to work on today, like what do y'all think? What is something you wanted to work on that we haven't done? I was also coming back from an injury, so I wasn't fully cleared yet, which was a blessing in disguise because it helped me to be more of a leader. I was more focused on how I could make my teammates better because there wasn't a lot I could do on the court myself, so it was a really cool experience. So, what do my teammates need from me right now? How can I make a practice plan? How can I encourage them to get the most out of this summertime? Because even though the coaches can't work with us, it's still a great opportunity for us to grow.



HAVE YOU ALWAYS BEEN A VOCAL LEADER, OR IS THIS SOMETHING YOU'VE GROWN INTO?

I would say I've always been like team captains on my teams, like in high school and growing up and stuff. Never to this extent have I had to lead a group of girls and then be the one person to make decisions, so using my voice was definitely a big challenge for me. I had to learn how to talk and talk in a way that people would listen to, but also be effective in holding people accountable while still being a good person that people could relate to. I learned a lot this spring and this summer, and I want to go into the coaching field, so I feel like I've learned a lot of good experiences, how I can get a group of people not to do what I want but understand what you're saying and being able to communicate effectively so they know what to do next, so it was a cool experience.

BEING THE CAPTAIN OF THIS TEAM, HOW DID THAT WORK? DO THEY VOTE ON IT?

Jamie sent out a survey, and we filled out the survey, and that was how it was decided.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE SEASON SO FAR, EIGHT GAMES INTO IT?

I'm super pumped about it. It was a great start, honestly I think for me. I kind of came into the season I know my team was super good, but you never want to put super

big expectations on your team to the point that it's a lot of pressure, so obviously, with a whole new team and a new coaching staff there was not a lot of hardcore expectations, there was just a lot of let's go out there and ball out. But I've been so proud of this team. I've seen these girls grow from the beginning of preseason and into these first games. We've had some tough situations to work through, and it's just been really cool to see us as a team go through that. I've really enjoyed it, and it's been a lot of fun. If you watch our team, we are fun to watch, like it's a lot of enthusiasm. I've been playing this sport for a long time, I'm a senior and this is definitely the most fun that I've had playing.

IS THIS YOUR LAST YEAR OF ELIGIBILITY?

No sir, I have another year. I fully plan on staying and playing another year.

WHAT ARE YOU STUDYING AT A&M?

I'm studying Kinesiology right now. I plan on getting my master's in Kinesiology or maybe sports science, and then I don't think I want to coach volleyball; I think I want to be a strength and conditioning coach.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE THING ABOUT BEING AN AGGIE?

I think the fan base and just the school spirit are so cool. It's just the support you feel just walking around campus or around College Station; just the support you get for being an Aggie is super cool.

WHAT'S BEEN YOUR FAVORITE MOMENT ON THE COURT SO FAR?

Last year, we swept Kentucky, that was a fun win. This season, I wouldn't say it was the most fun moment, but we were down eight – two in the fifth set, which usually, if you are down eight – two in the fifth set, you lose that set because it only goes to 15 points but I just saw a group of girls just get out there and grind and we came back and won the fifth set. So I think it was just such a huge growth moment, so that was really cool.

DO YOU HAVE A PLACE YOU ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO PLAYING THIS YEAR?

Yeah, I'm super pumped to play at Kentucky because it is super close to home for me, and we are playing in Rupp Arena, so it will be a super cool place to play. I have a bunch of friends that go to Kentucky, and it's close to home, so I'm super pumped to go to Kentucky.

YOU GREW UP IN OHIO, CORRECT?

Yes sir, in the Cincinnati area.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE TRADITION AT A&M?

I think the Aggie ring is super fun. Yeah, and you get to wear it the rest of your life. And just the way it is such a big deal here is cool.

COACH MORRISON FEELS LIKE THIS TEAM CAN BE REALLY GOOD. DO YOU AGREE?

I do feel the same. I feel like the competitive level we have is just really fun, and just seeing a good group of girls like really talented, but also the way they are willing to learn is really cool. I think that this team and this program, obviously we, are thinking of this season, but I always tell people I can't wait to see what this program does in five years down the road. I think it's going to be an awesome season, but I also think down the road, this program is going to do big things.

DID YOU WATCH THE NEBRASKA MATCH WITH 92,000 FANS? HOW COOL WOULD IT BE TO HAVE THAT AT KYLE FIELD?

I did. I think it should be in the making. I think that would be awesome! ■



COACH MORRISON ON LAUREN

Lauren is our team captain. And I've worked with some amazing ones throughout the years, but I think she is at the top of the list. For me, that relationship is really really important because if I'm the steering wheel of this team, she is the rudder of where this team is going culturally. And there has to be buy-in there. It has to be someone who is fully onboard. I see where you are taking this, and I believe in it, and I'm going to put in an equal amount of work but in a different way to get our team there. We wouldn't be where we are without her. I think from a volleyball standpoint too, I think the girls kind of credit her for the summertime work because I'm not allowed to be there. Putting in the organization so making sure that we are working on something specifically, not just coming in playing volleyball, so I think on the court and off we'd be lost if it wasn't for her.

Q&A

SAM MATHEWS



CAN YOU TAKE US BACK TO THE MOMENT YOU FOUND OUT YOU WERE THE NEW 12TH MAN?

Yeah, I remember it being a team meeting. The whole team was there, and he went through his normal Tuesday practice, just motivating us and telling us what the game plan was. And he said he had another announcement: we are going to name the 12th Man, and right there, my heart started to beat a little bit. I've worked hard to put myself hopefully on that list, so obviously, the opportunity was there. And he read through the whole history of the 12th Man going back to E. King Gill, and once he said Sam Mathews, it was a surreal moment, and everybody in the room went crazy. It was breathtaking; I can't really explain it in words. I just wanted to stand up, maybe call my mom, call the family; it was great being able to celebrate with my teammates.



DID YOU BLACK OUT A LITTLE BIT?

Oh, of course. I can't remember all the details, but I remember the good stuff.

YOU MENTIONED MOM. CAN YOU SHARE WITH US THE STORY ABOUT WHEN YOU TOLD MOM YOU WERE THE NEW 12TH MAN?

Yeah, it was a, we were waiting for a while. I didn't really know when the announcement would come, and my mom's been bugging me the entire time about when they were going to name the 12th Man. After it happened, you know, obviously I'm celebrating with all of my teammates and everything, but I wanted to get outside and call my mom (takes a deep breath, choked up with emotion.) Yeah I wanted to get outside and tell my mom. She's been a rock for me; she's sacrificed

so much for me (voice shaking). My dad was a marine, so he was out on tours and obviously the military life. They wake up early, and they come home late, and my mom did a great job of raising four kids. Yeah, it made everything worth it being able to call her and get her to talk to me and support me during that time.

YOU GREW UP A TEXAS A&M FAN. DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE MEMORY AS YOU WERE GROWING UP THAT MADE YOU WANT TO COME HERE?

You know, it comes back to the first time I came here in 2009. Somehow, my dad scored three tickets, so he brought me and my older brother. He actually left to go get drinks or something, and that was when they did the whole Aggie War Hymn, and I was completely new to the culture. I wasn't that engulfed into the A&M culture, but some older Aggie fans

started hunkering down right next to me. I was kind of taken off guard, but you fall in love with that kind of stuff. The camaraderie, the brotherhood, the community, the 12th Man is amazing. That's really where it sparked my, I bleed maroon, that where it sparked it.

YOU DECIDED TO COME BACK FOR ONE MORE YEAR; IS THIS WHY YOU CAME BACK?

100%! I knew it was within arm's reach, and I worked really hard to hopefully put my name up there, but I came back because I'm living the dream right now. A lot of people wish they could be where I am. I don't want to take it for granted. I had one more season, I had to work for one season, I had to sign a waiver, but I wanted to do everything I could to come back. It's been the most amazing three years of my life, and I wouldn't trade it for the world. That's definitely what motivated me to come back.

WHAT WILL YOU REMEMBER MOST FROM YOUR FIRST GAME AS THE 12TH MAN? LEADING THE TEAM ONTO THE FIELD CARRYING THE 12TH MAN FLAG?

Yeah, definitely leading the team out onto the field, watching every A&M

game, coming to every A&M game. That's been the most electric part of every game. At the very beginning, the music's loud, the smoke coming out, everybody comes out, and the crowd is electric; it roars, unlike anything I've ever heard. So to be able to carry that flag and, you know, to personify the spirit of the 12th Man on the field, yeah, I wanted to engage with them any chance I got. Whether it was running down on kickoff and trying to get them pumped up or waving the flag in front of the student section right after I ran out was also surreal. I definitely have to put leading the team out as my favorite memory.

I SAW THAT CULLEN GILLASPIA REACHED OUT TO YOU ON TWITTER. HAVE YOU HEARD FROM ANY OTHER FORMER 12TH MEN? WHAT IS THAT FRATERNITY LIKE?

Me and Gilly have had a relationship on the side; I've known him for a little bit. Choate reached out to me, and they are all great guys. They all believe in what the 12th Man stands for, and they all love to see it come to life every Saturday. I was glad that I was able to put on a show. It was extremely cool for Gillaspia to reach out to me. That was something I wasn't expecting, and it was really cool.

OBVIOUSLY, YOU WERE THE 12TH MAN, BUT WERE THERE ANY DIFFERENCES TO THIS SEASON OPENER COMPARED TO OTHER SEASON OPENERS?

If you were there, the game was crazy! Our offense, special teams defense, we were all firing on all cylinders. As far as you know anything other than me being 12th Man, I feel like the team came out, and we were really ready to play, and it gets me excited for the rest of the season, for sure. We got to throw in some young guys, and they made some plays, so that was really good to see that. It definitely feels different in the locker room, and I think we proved that on Saturday. So I'm looking forward to Miami.

WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU HAVE DONE TO PREPARE YOURSELF FOR THIS MOMENT?

Everything I've done prepares me for this moment. It's been a long road to get here, so finally being the 12th Man and, you know, getting all the things that come with getting the 12th Man, it makes the whole entire wait worth it. You know, sitting out for two years, not competing, for two full seasons, signing that waiver to find out that I get another season to come back and hopefully be the 12th Man. Yeah, it makes it all worth it. This was the climax of my entire career here, and it's just the beginning; it's only week one, so I still have a long season ahead of me, and I'm looking forward to hopefully leaving a legacy here.

YOU TALK ABOUT THE WAIVER. DID YOU KNOW YOU WERE GOING TO COME BACK? WAS IT A DIFFICULT PROCESS? WHEN DID YOU KNOW YOU WOULD BE ELIGIBLE TO COME BACK?

After the conclusion of last season, it was always my plan to come back. I go talk to Marcos; he's the eligibility guy, he's who I talked to. I wanted to find out if I had one season or two more seasons, and COVID rules were very hard for me to understand. I know Marcos does a better job of



understanding all of those things. I thought I was fine, I was going to come back and play another season, and there wasn't going to be a hiccup, but I went and talked to Marcos, and we found out that I'm out of eligibility and last season was my last season of eligibility. Due to COVID rules and some other things that got messed around in there, but we signed a waiver, I was texting Marcos probably every day because my mom was texting me every day trying to get the answers, but I think it took over a month of me waiting. We started at the beginning of fall camp, and it took until after fall camp ended for me to finally find out that the waiver was accepted or approved and I was going to be able to come back. So, fall camp was tough. It was draining both physically, mentally, and emotionally. You are out there practicing, and you don't really know if you're going to get a shot to come back. If the NCAA comes back and declines my waiver, then I just put in a lot of work for ultimately nothing if I'm not going to be playing this season. So that's how I found out. It was a rollercoaster of emotions for sure, but Marcos called me into his office to tell me that I got approved. I definitely came to tears in there; it was an emotional moment, but I'm still glad that it happened.

YOU LED THE TEAM IN SPECIAL TEAM SNAPS LAST YEAR; WHAT ABOUT IT DO YOU ENJOY? I KNOW YOU WERE A HIGH SCHOOL QUARTERBACK; I DON'T KNOW IF YOU WERE PLAYING SPECIAL TEAMS BACK THEN, BUT HOW DID YOU BECOME A GREAT SPECIAL TEAMS PLAYER, AND WHAT ABOUT IT DO YOU ENJOY?

Being a walk-on here, everybody tells you that special teams is the way to go, and I really bought into that. I found a home on special teams, and you know, being the 12th Man, that tradition goes back to when they would put all walk-ons on special teams. Guys who really bought into what special teams mean can really change the game. You know, people



that aren't really educated on football in general don't understand the idea of special teams and the impact it can have on a game. But I love the opportunity; you know there is a play to be made on every special team play, and I just like the opportunity to fly down there and maybe be the one to make it.

DOES IT ALMOST SEEM LIKE A MOVIE? YOU'RE TAILGATING WITH YOUR BUDDIES AT TEXAS A&M GAMES, RIGHT? NEXT THING YOU KNOW, JUST A COUPLE OF YEARS LATER, YOU'RE MAKING TACKLES OUT ON KYLE FIELD?

It's definitely a movie! Obviously, I dreamed about playing on the field when I was tailgating and watching the games, but the road to being on the field wasn't exactly like I had planned. Obviously, there were times of doubt; you think that maybe it's not gonna happen, your dream is too big, maybe look for something else, but after Covid and everything and I got the opportunity to walk on in the spring of 2021, it was a dream come true, and I wanted to give everything that I had to this team. I tried out to be a quarterback, and concluding the walk-on tryouts, I had a coach walk up to me and ask if I'd be open to playing any other position. I told him that I just wanted to help the Aggies. I want to be there whatever you need me; I'm willing to give it all. So they put me on special teams, and my role has grown from there. And who knows, maybe I'll get some defensive snaps, but it has definitely been a movie. Maybe we should talk



to someone about getting that in the works.

YOU ALSO HAVE YOUR BUDDIES TO THANK BECAUSE DIDN'T THEY ENCOURAGE YOU TO GET OUT AND GIVE IT A SHOT?

Yes, I don't think I could've done this without my support system. You know my family, my mom, my dad, Austin, Emily, and Faith, they pushed me and sacrificed so much to put me in the spot that I am. So I'm happy to make them proud (choking up) and my friends too; they push me too in every single way. I'm glad to be in the spot that I am.

BECAUSE YOU ARE THE 12TH MAN, YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO REPRESENT THE STUDENT BODY; WHAT KIND OF FEEDBACK HAVE YOU RECEIVED FROM THEM WHEN YOU MADE THAT FIRST PLAY ON SPECIAL TEAMS?

It's been so surreal engaging with the 12th Man, them being able to interact with me. You know, I resemble them on the field, and so I do everything I can to get them involved in the game, you know, get a little noise. But that was amazing; my solo tackle on the punt, the crowd roared. The announcer said That's your 12th Man, Sam Mathews. It's a dream come true. So the 12th Man being there to engage with me, support me, I'm going to give everything I can for them. And this season is going to be a long one, and I hope we can put on a show for them all year. ■



2023 FOOTBALL REWIND



GAME 1



TEXAS A&M 52 - NEW MEXICO 10

The Aggies entered the season with high hopes as the team returned the most starters from any club in the SEC. Jimbo Fisher also hired one of the best offensive minds in college football, Bobby Petrino, to take over the play-calling duties. After a couple of slow starts in previous campaigns, the Aggies were eager to get off to a fast start in this year's opener to set the tone for the rest of the season. The Lobos got the ball first and ate up half of the first quarter before having to punt the ball away. On the Ags first drive, they went 85 yards in seven plays and put seven points on the board with a Conner Weigman pass to Noah Thomas to take the lead. The Aggies would go on to add 28 more points in the second quarter as Evan Stewart scored on a 35-yard reception, and Noah Thomas added two more through the air as Weigman slung the ball all over the field. Le'Veon Moss also got in on the action, scoring a touchdown on the ground, which gave the Ags a 35-7 lead at the half. The defense only surrendered one touchdown in the half, as the Ags held the Lobos to only 133 yards of offense in the first half. Weigman would throw one more touchdown pass to Evan Stewart, giving him five on the day before coming out of the game. Max Johnson would lead the team on two more scoring drives and add a touchdown throw of his own to Moose Muhammad III, giving the Aggies 52 points and proving this offense had turned the corner from last year. The defense would surrender a third-quarter field goal, but that was all as the Aggies caged the Lobos in the season opener.

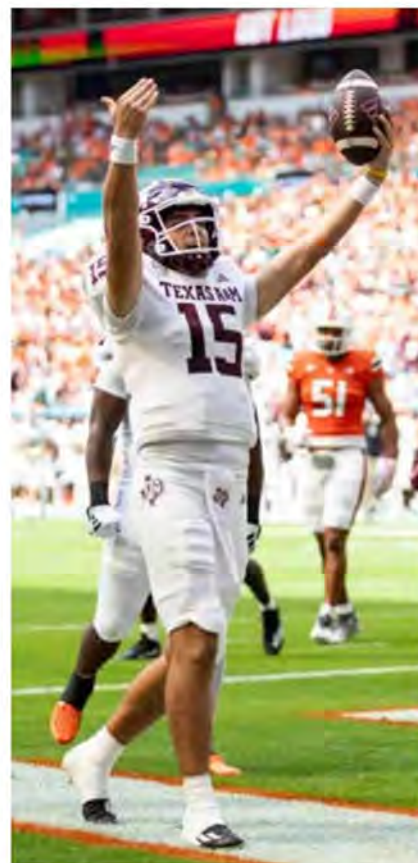


GAME 2



MIAMI 48 - TEXAS A&M 33

Most experts claimed that the game in Miami would be a make-or-break contest for the Aggies. Both teams were coming off disappointing 5-7 seasons, and both clubs saw this game as a springboard to something special. The Aggies were confident, as Petrino had called a great game the week before, and the Aggies looked to be hitting on all cylinders. The Aggies came out, forced a three-and-out and then blocked a punt to give the offense the ball on the Miami 15-yard line. Just three plays later, Weigman would put the Aggies on top with a one-yard touchdown run, and the Aggies would add a field goal to give them a ten-point lead. It seemed like the Aggies might run away with this one, but the Canes quarterback Tyler Van Dyke woke up the team, and with little to no pressure, the rest of the game carved up the Aggie secondary, and the Canes hung 48 points on the Aggies. Weigman was blitzed almost every play but still hung in and made plays all day. He completed 31 of 53 passes under heavy duress, throwing for 336 yards and two touchdowns. The Canes had a 98-yard kickoff return in which our 12th Man was held on the play right at the point of attack. Our offense was able to move the ball most of the day, but our defense struggled to put any pressure on the Canes quarterback, and we missed several tackles during the game. With much of the season still to play, this was a gut-check moment for our team to see how they would react moving forward.





GAME 3



TEXAS A&M 47 - ULM 3

After the tough loss in Miami, the team was looking forward to getting back on the field and showing the fans suffering from Battered Aggie Syndrome that this team could turn it around, and that's exactly what they did. Only the lightning before the game could stop the Aggies as they scored on their first seven drives in route to a 47-3 thumping of the Warhawks. Conner Weigman was outstanding as he completed 25 of 29 pass attempts for 337 yards and one touchdown with no interceptions. Taking the field without two of his main targets, Evan Stewart and Noah Thomas, Weigman had a field day with the Aggie receiving corps. Jahdae Walker had a breakout career day with five catches for 110 yards and his first touchdown as an Aggie. Conner and Max Johnson completed passes to ten different receivers during the game. Ainius Smith led all receivers with seven catches for 127 yards. The three-headed monster in our backfield of Rueben Owens, Le'Veon Moss, and Amari Daniels combined for 25 rushes on the day for 135 yards and two touchdowns. Freshman wide receiver Raymond Cottrell found the end zone for the first time in his career on a 13-yard pass from Max Johnson. Tight end Jake Johnson had six catches for 36 yards. It was a light day for punter Nik Constantinou, as the talented graduate student-athlete had only one punt for 48 yards that he killed on the one-yard line of the Warhawks. Randy Bond made four field goals during the contest, including a career-best 52-yarder. The defense allowed only three points, and ULM made only 8 first downs all day. The Aggie defense held the offense to only 95 yards through the air in the first half and zero yards in the second half. It was about as clean a game as you could hope for, and it gave the Aggies plenty of confidence heading into SEC play.

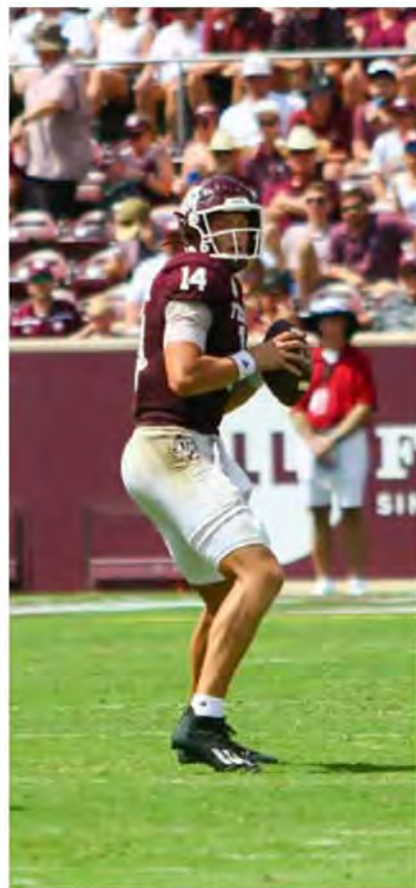


GAME 4



TEXAS A&M 27 - AUBURN 10

The Aggies welcomed the Auburn Tigers into Kyle Field for the conference play opener. Although the Aggies were able to move the ball on their first two drives, they had to settle for field goals and took a close 6-3 lead into the locker room at halftime. The big story of the game came right before the half when Conner Weigman was tackled in his own end zone and suffered what would be a season-ending injury to his leg. The Aggies regrouped during the half, and Max Johnson took the field after the defense forced another three and out to begin the third quarter. Max led the Aggies on a quick six-play drive that covered 46 yards and ended with a 22-yard touchdown pass to his brother Jake, giving the Aggies a 13-3 lead. Just one series later, Max found Evan Stewart for a 37-yard touchdown and a 20-3 lead. With the Aggie defense dominating the Tigers, they could only find the end zone once during the contest after Rueben Owens coughed up the ball, and a Tiger defender corralled it in the air and returned it for six. The Aggies would extend their lead once more when Amari Daniels rushed up the middle for 79 yards, and then Le'Veon Moss scored one play later on a four-yard run to give the Aggies a 27-10 victory.





GAME 5



TEXAS A&M 34 - ARKANSAS 22

The Southwest Classic has been dominated over the last eleven years by the Aggies, who have tallied ten wins. But the games are always close, including last year when the Hogs field goal kicker hit the top of the goal post at the end of the game to give the Aggies the win. This year's Classic will be remembered for the amazing Aggie defense that beat up on 6'3, 247 lbs KJ Jefferson from start to finish. They sacked the senior quarterback seven times and only allowed 174 yards of total offense to the Hogs, which included a 48-yard pass completion late in the game after the victory was decided. Max Johnson threw touchdown passes to Evan Stewart (32 yards) and Earnest Crownover (2 yards). The Aggie defense also put points on the board when Bryce Anderson blitzed KJ Jefferson in the third quarter and knocked the ball up in the air, and Chris Russell Jr. collected it and returned it 16 yards for an Aggie touchdown. Special teams were also a factor as "Mr. Everything" Ainias Smith, who suffered a season-ending injury in last year's game against the Hogs, went off on the Razorbacks, scoring on an 82-yard punt return that clinched the win. Smith was named SEC Special Teams Player of the Week with 131 yards on punt returns and a touchdown. He also had four catches for 71 yards. The piggy fans left the game early, and Jerry Jones presented the championship trophy to Jimbo and the gang in front of a partisan Aggie crowd.



GAME 6



ALABAMA 26 - TEXAS A&M 20

In game six of the season, the Aggies took on the Crimson Tide of Alabama in front of the third-largest crowd in Kyle Field history. The place was rocking as the two teams took the field. The Aggies took the ball first and moved it all the way down the field to the 19. But when Jimbo decided to go for it on fourth and one, the Bama defense stiffened, and the Aggies turned the ball over on downs. The Aggie defense came out on fire and forced a three-and-out, giving the Ags the ball again on the Bama 44. With the help of a 32-yard pass to Evan Stewart, the offense took advantage and got the ball to the Bama 5-yard line before settling for a field goal. The Tide answered with a field goal of their own and then took the lead on a 52-yard pass to Isaiah Bond, making it 10-3. The Aggies rebounded after a huge 46-yard punt return by Ainias Smith that set up a 22-yard touchdown catch by Jake Johnson that tied up the game. The Aggies took a seven-point lead before the half after a nice drive that resulted in a one-yard touchdown by Le'Veon Moss. The Tide would score the first 16 points of the second half on two touchdowns and a safety that gave them a 26 to 17 lead. The Aggies were unable to take advantage of two Bama turnovers in the second half. A late fourth-quarter holding call wiped out a Moss touchdown and forced the Ags to settle for a field goal, making the score 26-20. A failed onside kick and one more first down by the Tide ended the game.





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Rec Sports

DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

WOMEN'S LACROSSE

BY ROB HAVENS '88

If I told you we were going to watch the Aggies play a match where the terms "shooting space," "3 seconds," and "horizontal stick" were used, would you know where we were going? We would be headed to Penberthy Rec Sports Complex to cheer on the Fightin' Texas Aggie Women's Lacrosse Team.

The club began in 1992, and our team competes in the Texas Women's Lacrosse League (TWLL), where they play against teams from all over Texas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma. The current team has approximately 25 members who play their games in the spring and work hard to try and win a conference championship and the right to compete in the national tournament.

In the last two years, the Aggies have yet to make it to nationals after battling their main rival, the Texas Longhorns, in the conference championship game. According to Club President Abigail Standbrook, "We have a more mature team this year and are hoping we can come up on top and make it to Nationals!"

The club accepts all levels of experience, from members who have played all their lives to new members who have never had a stick in their hands before. Standbrook explained, "Most members do have some lacrosse experience, but we really emphasize a learning environment to teach each other as well as new lacrosse players."

The team practices three times a week for two hours. Standbrook says the team is like a second family to her, "I joined the team to create a family in College Station. I moved to Texas during my senior year of high school and only knew one person attending Texas A&M, so I was nervous about finding my group. I truly don't know how my college experience would be without this team, as it has given me a family and community away from home."

At the end of January, the team hosts the AggieLand Classic to generate funds for the club. Over 60 middle school and high school teams from all over Texas come to College Station for the annual tournament. The team runs the entire

event by sending emails, planning, checking waivers, selling shirts, contacting coaches, and even running the tables on the field during the day of the event.

We asked Standbrook what her favorite thing about being on the team was, and she told us, "My favorite thing about being on the team is the friendships I have made. Our president last year, Meredith Schomburg, became like a big sister to me, and the friendship, support, and guidance I gained from her is something I will never forget."



MEN'S VOLLEYBALL

BY ROB HAVENS '88

During the fall, you will see pictures and stories about our women's volleyball team in our magazine. But they are not the only volleyball team on campus. In fact, our Men's Volleyball Club has been digging, spiking, and serving up volleyballs on campus since 1976.

Last year's squad finished No. 5 in the nation, the best in club history. The Aggies graduated only one player from last year's A team, so they have confidence they can make another run this season.

The club has 24-26 players that play on two teams, an A team and a B team. They have scheduled practices on Mondays and Wednesdays, but they get together as often as possible to get in some more work. The club has players with different experience levels. Some have competed for several years while others just started playing when they walked into tryouts.

Club President Ian Wilkinson grew up with two sisters who played collegiately, so when it was time to go to college, he

was ready to compete at the next level. He told us, "Even though we are a step down from varsity teams, we still are quite competitive and strict with how we run our program."

Some of the most notable players on the team are Benjamin Hutka, Broderick Miller, Luke Blasingame, and Sanoop Vattakuzhiyil. Benjamin, Broderick, and Luke were on the All-Conference Team, and Sanoop was placed on the 2nd All-Tournament National Team.

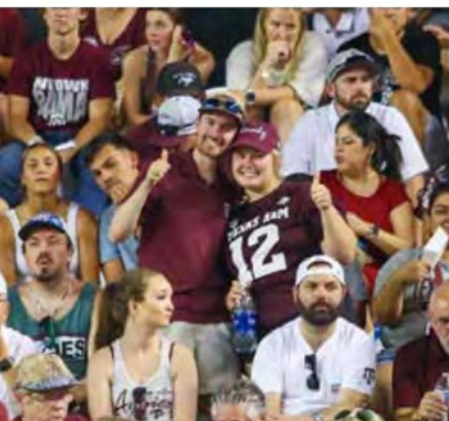
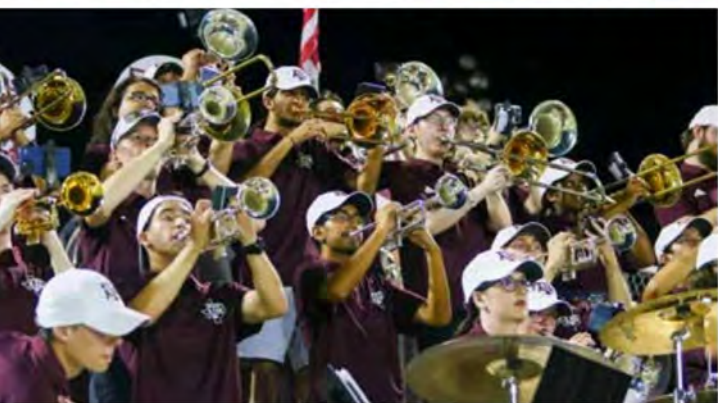
The teams compete in the spring, battling against opponents like the University of Texas and LSU to earn the best ranking for the conference tournament. Then, they move on to the national tournament in April.

Wilkinson said, "This team is a lot different than the ones I have been on in the past; we become pretty tight-knit once the year starts and are constantly with each other throughout the year and even off-season. I am proud to serve

as their President because I can see the drive in my teammates, and I want to provide the most for them so that we can all achieve the goal of winning the national title."

For someone interested in joining the club, we asked Wilkinson what makes a great volleyball player, and he told us, "From a player's and a coach's point of view, a great volleyball player is someone who not only possesses high-level technical skills on the court but is coachable and a great teammate. A key to our club's success truly lies within our team chemistry and the guys that we have by our side when we are on and off the court."







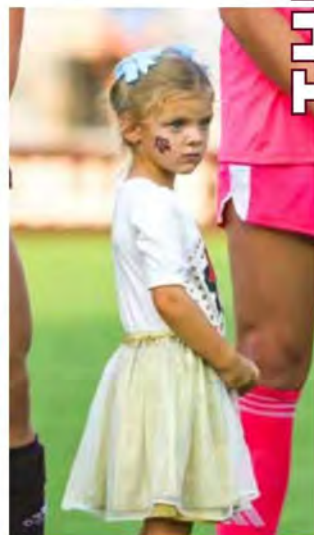
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THE 12TH MAN



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